DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 474 296 CE 084 685

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TITLE	Applying Metaphor in HRD Research and Practice: Innovative Session.
REPORT NO	No-8
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	6p.; In: Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) Conference Proceedings (Honolulu, Hawaii, February 27-March 3, 2002); see CE 084 635.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Behavior Change; Definitions; *Educational Research; Group Discussion; Human Resources; *Labor Force Development; *Metaphors; *Organizational Development; *Personnel Management; Research Methodology; Research Needs; Scholarly Journals; Synthesis; *Theory Practice Relationship; Training; Training Methods

ABSTRACT

A group of human resource development (HRD) practitioners participated in an innovative session on applying metaphor in HRD research and practice. The session objectives were as follows: (1) facilitate a dialogue between those who wrote for and those who read the Advances in Developing Human Resources (ADHR)issue on metaphor in HRD; (2) extend the dialogue beyond the ADHR issue by exploring the application of metaphor in HRD research and practice through case studies; (3) identify new opportunities for research into HRD metaphor and a network of interested researchers. The session was designed in four parts as follows: (1) an introduction that included definitions of metaphor, introductions to the language of metaphor and various forms of metaphor, descriptions of the theoretical links between metaphor and behavior/behavior change, and examples of the use of metaphor in HRD research and practice; (2) small group discussions on metaphor in HRD research and practice; (3) a group discussion debriefing during which each small group shared a summary of its discussions and conclusions and facilitators identified cross-cutting agreements, concerns, and questions about metaphor application in HRD research and practice; and (4) a wrap-up during which the session's main learning points were identified and summarized. (Contains 8 references.) (MN)

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2002 AHRD Conference

Innovative Session 8

Honolulu, Hawaii

February 27 - March 3, 2002

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Applying Metaphor in HRD Research and Practice: Innovative Session

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This paper provides information on the innovative session in the form of a brief theoretical framework, a set of session objectives, and a description of the process. It is intended to inform conference participants as they make the decision about whether to attend the session, and to provide them with background reading prior to the session.

Keywords: Metaphor, Research Design, HRD Practice

"... metaphors are capable of giving us a new understanding of our experience. Thus they can give new meaning to our pasts, to our daily activity, and to what we know and believe" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 139).

Volume 3, issue 3 of the series *Advances in Developing Human Resources* (ADHR) was dedicated to Metaphor in Human Resource Development. It brought together articles written by some of the HRD scholars who have been at the forefront of exploring the current, and potential, use of metaphor in HRD research, practice, and education. Part of the history of that issue can be traced back to an innovative session on metaphor held during the 2000 AHRD conference in Raleigh-Durham. This session will further the work by providing a vehicle for facilitating dialogue between the authors and readers on the content of the ADHR issue with the view to clarifying understanding, exploring the application of metaphor in HRD research and practice, and highlighting options for collaborative research. The session will give equal weight to application of metaphor in HRD research and practice, as well as to theoretical aspects of metaphor.

This brief paper provides a theoretical framework for the session, and outlines the session objectives and design. Conference attendees are also invited to read other papers on metaphor elsewhere in the conference proceedings.

Theoretical Framework

Despite there being well over 125 documented definitions of metaphor (Leary, 1990), there is a clear tradition that views them as central to the task of accounting for our perspectives on the world (Cameron, 1999). This cognitive stance argues that people not only use metaphorical language, but the way they view the world is structured using metaphor that frame realities. Metaphors are therefore considered to not only influence language but also behavior. As such, the metaphors used in HRD (as elsewhere) influence how reality is framed by those in the field, how

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problems are conceptualized, how solutions are designed, and how efforts are evaluated (Tsoukas, 1991). That nature of that influence could benefit or hinder the field but, without an explicit analysis of the impact of metaphor on HRD, those in the field will be unaware of the benefits, the hindrances, and how to change the situation. This gives rise to discussions on how perspectives, language, and behavior of those in HRD can be influenced by changing the metaphors-in-use.

Metaphor analyses have been completed for several fields of study, for example: psychology (Leary, 1990), human resource management (Dunn, 1990), information systems (Kendall & Kendall, 1993), organizations (Morgan, 1997), and teaching (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). The ADHR issue on metaphor made a major contribution in closing the gap between HRD and other disciplines in the level of attention paid to metaphor. It did that in the areas of:

- Understanding metaphor theory: Summarizing metaphor theory and research from the disciplines of applied linguistics and cognitive-psychology, and in so doing highlighting the importance of further research into HRD metaphor.
- Learning about HRD from current metaphors-in-use: Research was reported that studied metaphors in the language of HRD, with analyses of what those metaphors may tell us of how we conceive of HRD, what values underpin our language and behaviors, and how aware HRD professionals are of the metaphors they use and their potential implications.
- Metaphors in HRD research, practice, and education: Examples were provided of how metaphors were collected and analyzed in HRD research, of how metaphors could be (and were being) used by HRD practitioners both in training and in organizational change, and of how metaphors could be used in the education of HRD academics and practitioners.
- Critical analysis of metaphor in HRD: Dominant metaphors were highlighted, as was the need to challenge such metaphors and generate new metaphors that could influence how situations were perceived and actions were designed. Examples were offered of how different surface metaphors could influence conceptual metaphors and behaviors in HRD.
- Strategies for metaphor in HRD: Cross-cutting analysis of the content of the issue, when combined with work of other scholars, led to the first steps in understanding the concept of best practice in HRD research, practice, and education.

Short (2001), when reflecting on the content of the ADHR issue, highlighted six main implications for HRD, and five of those six form the basis of this innovative session. The five are:

- HRD researchers should increase their understanding of the application of metaphor in data collection, analysis, and reporting; paying attention to the options, benefits, and risks. They would be helped by the development of agreed best practice in the use of metaphor in HRD research.
- HRD practitioners need to reflect critically on the metaphors that drive their work within organizations, including the dominant metaphors they use for conceiving of organizations and their role in them. That process would be supported greatly by the sharing of practices, for example through conference papers and journal articles.
- Metaphor should be considered for inclusion in the education of HRD professionals, both in terms of theory and its application to HRD. For example, the development of HRD practitioners could usefully cover methods for applying metaphor in organizational diagnosis, intervention design, and communication during planned change.
- HRD professionals should continue to explore the application of metaphor in other disciplines and consider its suitability for transferring into HRD, as demonstrated through the application of metaphor in psychotherapy and the potential for its use in HRD consultancy, coaching, and counseling.
- Systematic research is needed to fully understand the impact of metaphor on HRD. In completing that, the discipline would benefit from challenging dominant metaphors and questioning how those lead to practices and beliefs that are currently taken for granted.

Session Objectives

The innovative session is designed with the over-arching objectives of:

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- Facilitating a dialogue between those who wrote for, and those who read, the ADHR issue on metaphor in HRD, to allow questions to be raised, and provide further clarification on the application of metaphor in HRD.
- Extending the dialogue beyond the ADHR issue by exploring the application of metaphor in HRD research and practice using case studies (linked to a symposium paper on the use of client- and consultant-generated metaphor in HRD practice).
- Identifying new opportunities for research into HRD metaphor and a network of interested researchers.

Within those over-arching objectives, the session will provide a forum where:

- Researchers can discuss the application of metaphor in data collection, analysis, and reporting; paying attention to the options, benefits, and risks. Research described in the ADHR issue will act as the introduction to metaphor application in HRD research, and a case study will then be used to provide the basis for small group discussions of application options, methods, and issues.
- Practitioners can reflect critically on their use of client metaphors to analyze situations and identify potential interventions. Again, the case study will provide the broad context for the discussion on application by HRD practitioners.
- All participants have the opportunity to explore the theoretical foundations on metaphor, and the links between metaphor, cognition, behavior, and behavior change.

Session Content and Structure

The session will be designed in four parts:

- Introduction – Participants will hear an overview of the session, and be introduced to the facilitators. This part will also include definitions of metaphor, introductions to the language of metaphor (e.g. labels), illustrations of the various forms of metaphor, and descriptions of the theoretical links between metaphor, behavior, and behavior change. Speakers will also illustrate the use of metaphor in HRD research and practice, and in so doing to provide participants with an understanding of methods and issues for use later in the session.
- Group discussions on metaphor in HRD research and practice – In small groups, participants will utilize a case study to apply basic metaphor techniques, both from the context of the researcher and the practitioner. This will allow for discussion, thus increasing the opportunity for participants to raise examples, ideas, issues, and concerns. Participants will also have the opportunity to dialogue with ADHR authors over the application of metaphor in HRD research and practice.
- Group discussion debriefing – Each small group will share a summary of its discussions and conclusions; and facilitators will identify cross-cutting agreements, concerns, and questions about metaphor application in HRD research and practice.
- Summarizing learning – main learning points will be identified and summarized.

Is this New and Innovative?

The session is innovative in several ways:

- It uses a session at an AHRD conference to maintain the momentum from an ADHR issue, in part by facilitating dialogue between authors and readers, and in part by supporting application of ADHR learning points through case studies discussed in small groups.
- It furthers work on five of the six 'main implications' identified by the ADHR, thus moving forward a small step on a lot of fronts.
- It provides participants with the opportunity to discuss and apply material from a symposium paper on the application of metaphor in psychotherapy and lessons for HRD.
- It allows for levels of participation and interaction not possible from symposia sessions.
- It provides a forum for identifying new examples of metaphor application in HRD research and practice, as part of continuing work to describe best practice. These will be used in the design of future research.

What this Session Contributes to HRD

With reference to the session's stated objectives, its contribution to HRD includes the following:

- Facilitating a dialogue between those who wrote for, and those who read, the ADHR issue on metaphor in HRD – this will allow for questions about the issue to be raised, provide further clarification on the application of metaphor in HRD, elicit new examples and viewpoints on metaphor in HRD, further clarify current knowledge on best practice, and identify new opportunities for research into HRD metaphor.
- Providing conference attendees with the opportunity to apply metaphor in small groups case study discussions, thus increasing their understanding of application techniques.
- The session content will be summarized and used in writings on best practice in applying metaphor in HRD.

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